



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

COMMITTEES

**Employment, Workplace Relations and
Workforce Participation Committee**

Report

SPEECH

Monday, 18 June 2007

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Hayes, Chris, MP

Source House
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Responder
Question No.

Mr HAYES (Werriwa) (5.25 pm)—I am glad I am following my colleague the member for Moreton in debating this House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration report on the tourism sector. I have to say he did make a very significant contribution to this inquiry, particularly in relation to vocational education, much of which was picked up in this report, and I think the industry will be better for it if they actually act on a number of those recommendations.

I acknowledged the contribution of my friend earlier today but I did not acknowledge the former chair of this committee, the member for Deakin, who instigated this inquiry. I should mention that the member for Deakin, Mr Barresi, was very committed to this inquiry from the outset. I am sure we mourned his passing as chair as we visited Cairns, the Northern Territory and other places like that, drilling down into this inquiry!

Mr Hardgrave—I agree with you, Member for Werriwa, and I associate myself with your comments.

Mr HAYES—On a more serious note, I would also like to join with the chair and commend the committee secretariat: the secretary, Dr Anna Dacre; the inquiry secretary, Siobhan Leyne; the research officer, Loes Slattery; and the admin officer, Daniel Miletic. These people, quite frankly, have put in a sterling effort on this report. They do a lot, as the member for Moreton indicated, to make us look good. A report like this is as much a reflection of their dedication, professionalism and commitment as it is of the serious way in which all the participating members approached this inquiry. We are very fortunate to have such professional service available to us. As I said in the main chamber, it is something that we should not take for granted; we should certainly acknowledge the support that we do get from that part of the organisation and the people who are always able to give us independent advice whenever we need it. Without dwelling on it, that is certainly something that is significant and something that should be recognised.

In this inquiry, one of the things that was challenging the committee was: what is the tourism industry? Largely, the tourism industry is basically whoever considers themselves to be in tourism. Unfortunately, that does not translate in terms of participation in some form of structured industry. I agree with the member for Moreton that one of the things that was quite apparent throughout this inquiry, when people spoke of tourism jobs, was that it was a job that you had before you had a job. That actually flows through into the general mentality or attitude, certainly the attitude to training and retaining staff—and an attitude that prevents the industry taking that next step and going further. I think for the industry it is important that it does view itself as a significant part of our economy.

For instance, this industry accounts for something in the order of \$17 billion in terms of overseas earnings or annual net income. It contributes about 3.9 per cent to the GDP. These are significant figures. This is not simply a fledging industry. Sure, it is a young industry, but it is also an industry which has its place. It certainly has a significant attraction and value to it and it has tremendous growth opportunity. But, to do that, the industry has got to start investing in itself.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you and I, like everybody else, know there is no shortage of lobbyists in this industry. When people want something, they will come and knock at our doors, but they will not do it collectively. They will not look at this as an industry. One of the clearest examples of that was when we started looking at employment in this industry. I understand this, and I take the advice and evidence that was presented. A lot of employers were not of the view of investing in training because the staff may not be there—the employers have a high turnover rate and, if the employers invest, someone else is going to benefit from it. So they are not actually looking collaboratively as an industry at training. They are saying, ‘What’s good for me and my enterprise in my business?’ The trouble is that an industry is no stronger than the weakest link. I know there are cost inputs in this, but I think the member for Moreton is right: we do need to do various things, particularly in relation to recognition of prior learning. If someone moves from one business to another part of the business or to interstate or works in one of the resorts in the ski fields and picks up skills as they go, that should be seen as building up

this collective skills base and almost as having a skills passport. But we do not recognise that, as someone is a 'new employee' every time that they start somewhere else. That is something that has to change.

The sector of the industry that showed probably the most foresight in this regard was the Australian ski one. They knew that they had a very limited season. They knew that they wanted to attract people back into their sector of the industry in following seasons. They were trying to work collaboratively with each other in what they had to do to attract people back and how they would share staff around. Someone might stay in one resort one year and work at the chalet down the road next year—but it was all about their staying in the industry. That is how the ski sector was starting to see itself.

That is what has got to occur with this industry, and we have set out a range of recommendations that look at that. Training should not be seen as an impost on a particular employer but as an investment in the industry. If we are serious about growing this industry, that has really got to occur. For that to occur, one of the things that we need to do is, quite frankly, have the industry focus on itself. I actually wrote, as one of our key recommendations, that we see the establishment of an industry leaders forum to look at these issues over a range as wide as the industry itself. It would not be as to Joe Bloggs's motel down the road or anything like that. It would be a coming together of all the very small parts. It would be the motels sector, the hotels sector, the chalets sector—all the tourism resort sectors—coming together to work out what they need to do to expand this industry as an industry. As I said, I have actually billed that as one of our key recommendations.

This industry has now got to pick up the lead that has been set by this inquiry and follow the recommendations in the report. We call on the federal government to help facilitate the establishment of an industry leaders forum to focus on these issues. I, the member for Moreton and every other participant in this committee believe that, quite frankly, for the tourism experience to be valuable it must in fact involve a lot of the labour force employed by this industry. Therefore, that needs investment if we are going to attract people back—as against the once in a lifetime 'I won't stay there again' syndrome, the 'Fawlty Towers' syndrome—because attracting people back to the tourism experience is all about employed people and having those people trained, having those people accredited and having people who can move about in the industry safe in the knowledge that they are building up their skills. They include chefs to some extent. I know that to date all our views about apprenticeship training have been based on time. But for this industry it is probably not sensible to base everything on time, because a lot of it is seasonal and people may still be able to undertake their training whilst they are employed in a particular area. We should make sure that training in this industry is competency based and that the competencies are at least recognised and transportable to every employer that a person goes to.

Mr Hardgrave—They love our kids in Canada.

Mr HAYES—Exactly, and I take the point of the member for Moreton. One of the tragedies of all this is that those in overseas tourist destinations appreciate the training that has been done and the skills that have been developed by a lot of our young people, but we are not doing that when it comes to developing our own tourism industry. I think to some extent it is a matter of maturity.

We are now saying it is time to take the next step. It is time to move this industry forward. It is time to develop this industry to its potential. It is time to invest in the development of skills and not simply provide a job before someone gets another job. We are now talking about developing careers to make this industry sustainable and to make this industry somewhere people want to work for a lifetime and get their passport to work all around this country in first-class facilities. The young people of this nation are entitled to be proud. They are certainly entitled to receive the training that is going to accredit them for full participation throughout their working life, hopefully in this industry. We have to now bite the bullet and realise that this is an industry worth working in and it is an industry worth having a career in—this is something the committee is unanimous on. (*Time expired*)